1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

764 766 776 775 764 766 776 793 if, after a time, an expensive and troublesome ceremony is not performed to bring them out and lodge them in a jar. The *hungan* who performs the rite of removing these *loa* is preferably himself a member of the family and is usually left alone with one or two assistants and an elderly relative of the dead, but if the family includes no *hungan*, the one who is called, even though greatly trusted, is most carefully watched, because a strange priest might take for himself the valued gods of the dead, leaving only the weak ones. The *hungan* stands in place and calls the name of the dead. He puts some of the hair of the dead in the jar or in a calabash, with which the *loa* is supposed to go, and, unless another member of the family, nominated to receive the *connaissance* of the dead, is present, the jar or calabash is sealed until these spirits can be "given" to a successor.

766 [764] [793] No special purification is needed for a house where death has occurred except when the deceased was tubercular or a leper, when everything except his money is buried or thrown in some unfrequented place. The body of one who has died of smallpox, though washed, is buried as soon after death as possible without being enclosed in a coffin. Those who die of smallpox or leprosy, suicides, or persons shot as a punishment for crime are not buried in the communal cemetery, but in special sections of the graveyard, the lepers and victims of smallpox being separated from the others, for the Church declares these have died of the plague. One who drowns is buried at the riverside where his body is recovered, though if the corpse is not too badly decomposed, the authorities give permission, and the family of the dead can afford the expense of transportation, the body may be brought home. Children are [561] [791] buried in the cemetery, but, on the principle that "the young must serve their elders," the funeral of a child is attended only by those relations who are younger than the dead; for in Haiti, as in Africa, it is not held seemly that the young should be followed to the grave by their elders. At the house, however,

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[Information on the removal of the loa or maît'tête from the head of the deceased will be found in category 764.]

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

793 [069] [783] approval of the candidate's elevation is needed. He is also regarded as being on more intimate terms with the family ancestors who, likewise, must be in accord with the proceedings. The candidate for the asson is confined within the hounfor for a number of days, during which he takes purification baths and participates in other rituals. The rites that take place during this period are prescribed by the elder priest who has assumed responsibility. When the purification is ended, the candidate emerges into the *peristyle* (roofed court) to participate in the general service, and to undergo further tests.

Present during the ceremonies are all the principal houngans of the region—men who will be friendly associates of the new priest or, possibly, unfriendly competitors. The candidate is tested on his knowledge [789] of how to use the asson and the tiny hand bell, and in the course of the service he is mounted by the loa who is the chief protector of the cult temple. [782] Animals are sacrificed, and all the loa sacred to the hounfor are invoked and asked for their approval and support. But it is not only the loa [794] and the dead who must indicate their approval. The elder houngan polls the hounsi kanzo on whether they will accept their new cult chief and follow him. [533] He also asks the chief drummer, who polls his assistant drummers. It is taken for granted that the decision is in the hands of the hounsi. The consensus is known before the actual service, but the formality of asking the question is observed. Should the hounsi refuse to accept the candidate for the asson, the elevation cannot take place.

793 554 627 [791] The city and the countryside contain many self-styled houngans and bocors who are not recognized as bona fide by the community, regardless of the route by which they claim to have achieved their station. Sometimes they are regarded as *pas fort* (not strong); that is, they do not have profound knowledge and understanding. The Haitian is quick to detect the difference between a houngan who knows and one who does not know. Many are stated to be outright fakes. One man who attempted to hold a service in Port-au-Prince aroused such contempt and disgust that a number of persons who had been drawn by genuine interest walked out with remarks that the man should be punished. In fact, his failure to show any [533] essential qualifications for the houngan's role was commented upon in a song of ridicule that made its appearance at a secular dance that same night. The song noted some of the humorous aspects of the service, such as when the "impostor" struck himself vigorously on the head with the flat of a machete to show his "strength" and virtually incapacitated himself for the rest of the evening.

346 It is easily observed that no two hounfors are exactly alike. They differ

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Hait SV3

the gate, and the crossroads, is not regarded in the same light as the other loa but as a messenger and intercessor, and as the crossroads protector. He it is who helps in the placation of the major gods, and who guards people against accident, chance, and evil spirits on the highway.

In traditional form, services for Mait' Grand Bois and Femme Grand Bois are conducted by the family without the aid of a houngan, under the direction of the oldest male member of the family. The rites begin on a Thursday. With a tiny bell in his hand, the elder who directs the service (he is called *grand famille*) calls upon Mait' Grand Bois to come and receive his feast. The procedures are solemn. The grand famille and the family sing. At last Grand Bois enters the head of the old man who is conducting the rites. Then the sacrificial animals are brought forward and killed, and the women take the meat and begin the cooking of the mangé. While the food is cooking, the family sits and waits. Sometimes the grand famille begins a song, in which others join. The cooking takes a long while. Sometime during the night, when the food is ready, it is placed in two baskets—one for Mait' Grand Bois and one for his wife, Femme Grand Bois. Into each basket goes meat, corn meal, rice, bread, cookies, peanut cakes, cassava, and other delicacies. The two baskets are hung by ropes from the roof of the tonnelle, or from the branch of a tree. During the entire night, none of the family eats. Mait' Grand Bois and his wife partake of the feast as they please. At six o'clock in the morning, the baskets are taken down, and the family is free to eat what the loa have left for them.

When the food is gone, the bones that are left are carried to a nearby stream and washed until they are white and shining. The bones are then placed in a large calabash bowl. Sweet-scented leaves from special trees are placed in the bowl with the bones, and water is added. The mixture becomes a ritual lotion, or "bath." The entire family kneels before the liquid, which they rub on their faces, heads, arms, hands, legs, and feet. When the ritual bathing is over, they sing:

La famille vin' payé sang,
La famille vin' payé sang,
Cérémonie là c'est finil [Ex.41]

The family comes to pay blood,
The family comes to pay blood,
The ceremony is finished!

Afterward, each member of the family places a small coin in the calabash dish with the bones and leaves, and the residue is then buried in a deep hole at a crossroads. A heavy post (*borne*) is erected at the site, with markings to indicate the date of the service, and the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, each representing a year. Every year one of the numbers is checked off, and at the end of four years another service for Mait' Grand Bois and Femme Grand Bois is held.

2: Courlander B-8 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

special future help and consideration from the loa (including the cessation of the illnesses or other misfortunes that have led to the marriage). A man (or woman) united with a loa in "matrimony" is "stronger" (*plus fort*) in his relationship to his environment and to other people. For this reason, the initiative for a mystic marriage does not always come from a loa. An ambitious person may seek such a marriage to strengthen his hand, to provide protection against other deities or human enemies, or to gain wealth or position. One observer, Odette Mennesson Rigaud, expresses the opinion that in such instances the marriage "is no longer a religious union of mystic love, but a magic pact."[10A] The implicit element of "pact" is so evident in all mystic marriages, even when the initiative comes from the loa, that the distinction is not easily appreciated. However, persons suspected of "pushing" for a marriage with a loa are regarded as presumptuous or reckless, and often they are believed to have hidden motives. It is felt by many that the benefits of such a union can be only temporary and that catastrophe will ultimately follow.

A human party to marriage with a loa is deeply committed. He is subject to jealousy and anger on the part of his mystic mate. His behavior in the hounfor as in his daily life must be beyond the loa's reproach. He must avoid possession by other loa. And he must fulfill endless obligations. Sometimes the prospect of such binding ties is more than a man (or woman) is ready to face, and through the intercession of a strong houngan the loa may be induced to withdraw his demand for marriage. In that event, a special service is held, in the course of which the person buys his freedom with promises of special gifts and feasts for the deity.

One young man I knew was caught in a special dilemma—the houngan and the loa on one side, the Protestant Church on the other. The man, named Maurice, came from the mountains near Léogane. He was married but had no children. His wife's family, still living in Léogane, was Protestant. Maurice himself was a follower of Vodoun, and nominally a Catholic. When his wife was afflicted with a long series of headaches and earaches, Maurice consulted a houngan of Port-au-Prince. The houngan said that the loa Ayida Wèdo was demanding marriage with Maurice, and that the wife's illnesses were an indication of jealousy.

At the same time, the wife's parents came from Léogane and insisted that the girl's illnesses were brought about by God because Maurice was a follower of Vodoun. They demanded that he sever all his connections with Vodoun and become a Protestant.

After considerable anxiety, Maurice "purged" himself of Vodoun and

[10A] Odette Mennesson Rigaud, "Notes on Two Marriages with Vodoun Loa," in Appendix A of Deren, Divine Horsemen, P. 264 Cf P 351, Category 11b. -- Analyst]

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

159 588 753 783 588 [193]

joined the Protestant Church. Subsequently his wife's illnesses subsided somewhat, but she never bore children. Maurice suspected that the latter misfortune was the result of his spurning his mystic suitor.

The actual ceremonies by which a mystic marriage is performed carry over many of the customs and trappings of ordinary mortal marriages. The prêt' savane reads prayers and officiates until the two parties are deemed wed. The loa is represented by a "stand-in," usually a person possessed by the loa and dressed in appropriate garb. Gold wedding rings are placed upon the fingers of the couple. There are wedding cakes and wedding contracts. Nothing appropriate to an ordinary wedding is omitted.

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

The cow was

never seen again, and after a prêt' savane had read prayers over the spring the people again drew water from it.

Baka more often change themselves into gray or red pigs, but one ingenious baka was said to have transformed himself into a bicycle, which was seen traveling alone at night on the road from Port-au-Prince to Léogane.

Some people wear charms against the baka's malevolence; but the most effective weapon is the cocomacaque stick. The cocomacaque, or monkey palm, is a palm tree that grows only a few feet high. It has magical powers to drive off not only baka but other evil beings as well. When the tree is growing in its natural state, it is said, you must never mention its name in its own presence. Should you say within its hearing, for example, "Look at the cocomacaque," it will wilt and fall over, losing all its vital powers. The trunk of this midget palm is a favorite material for fashioning a walking stick or a short baton. A man going on a long journey into strange country may carry a cococmacaque stick with him to brandish at the crossroads where baka lurk, or to drive off strange animals that may be baka in disguise.

In their relationships with human beings, the baka are not always random. Sometimes, for a terrible price, they will undertake to make a man rich or to "eat" his enemies for him.

In some parts of Haiti, baka seemingly have found their way into the ranks of the loa. In the Congo-Guinée pantheon there is a deity called Bakulu Baka, or Babaku Baka. He is a malevolent spirit who "eats" people in the best baka tradition, and he lives, significantly, in the mapou tree, which is shunned by all good loa.

The *engagements*, or compacts, in which baka sometimes figure are usually made with another sort of creature, the *djab*, or devil. A djab is a manlike being but is superhuman, ferocious, and terrible. Some djab are small, some large, some innocent in appearance, some grotesque. They are supernatural sorcerers who deal out riches in exchange for human beings. A frustrated or desperate man may go to a djab and ask for a favor, which will usually be granted for a heart-rending price. Persons who appear to gain wealth suddenly may be suspected of having entered into an *engagement* with a powerful djab.

One story is about a man of Port-au-Prince who, needing a large sum of money, went to a famous djab who lives in a cave known as Trou Fourban. This powerful djab agreed to provide all the money required, but only on condition that the man deliver to him each year one of his children. The man suddenly came into a large fortune. But when the anniversary of his compact arrived, he did not go to Trou Fourban

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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highest idea of power and action. Logically, he could not conceive of the unique God of the Christians, by analogy and by inspiration, except in terms of the sentiment of fear mingled with the awe which the colonist inspired in him. Once this first step was taken, the rest was only the work of time. In the degree that the holy beings of Catholicism were unfolded to them, the creole Negroes everywhere identified these with the *vodun* (spirits) of the Dahomean cult."[19]

The Christian God could not stop the "deifying" process, for Vodun must have simple spiritual explanations for daily occurrences. How could a god who ruled the earth clutter his mind with such small details as the mango crop or one's private aches? There was room of necessity for more, and lesser, gods.

Orthodoxy and monotheism, then, are alien to Vodun; so likewise are the notions of sin and a moral law. These also are refined ideas. The Catholic priests do their best to instill into the minds of the people the Church doctrine on these points, but gluttony, envy, sloth, and other deadly sins are not easy to explain to a people whose worldly goods are pitifully few, whose bellies are never full, and who must work hard to live at all. Just how the simple Haitian interprets the fulminations of the fathers against sin a foreigner can hardly tell, and the priests are not at liberty to reveal the secrets of the confessional.[20] A peasant loves life. His pleasures are simple enough, partly because he lacks money for expensive ones. Puritanical self-searching is alien to the normal Haitian. The touchstone is infallible: so long as life moves along smoothly one need not worry; if misfortune comes, one of the spirits is angry or out of sorts and his worshipers must propitiate him. What spirit could mind a man's dancing, drinking clairin, watching a cockfight, or otherwise indulging himself?

Vodun does not conceive life to be a struggle between good and evil. Its conception of spirits is anthropomorphic. No man is wholly good or wholly evil, nor is any god; human beings can generally be persuaded into any mood, and so can the gods; as there is variety in human personality, so likewise the gods are not immutable. Some are more to be feared than others, some may be regarded with tender affection, but all are capable of working both weal and woe.

19. Dorsainvil, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

20. A priest once told me that a young Haitian girl in sorrow confessed, as her most heinous sin, that she had given food to a dog. Apparently her idea was that food was too precious to be given away to animals; hence she had sinned.